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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how to increase the national vocational education and training (VET) research effort in Australia and the mechanisms to increase the knowledge about and use of research results. Section 1, "Introduction," addresses the rapid change in VET and importance of a national VET research effort. Section 2, "Increasing the National VET Research Effort," describes the national research and evaluation strategy for VET for 1997-2000 and six priority areas: economic and social implications of VET; employment and work force; pathways from school to work; outcomes of the VET sector; quality of VET provision; and future issues affecting the VET sector. Progress to date is reported. Section 3, "The Effectiveness of the National VET Research and Evaluation Effort," takes a general look at recent studies and focuses on two reviews: (1) the Figgis review, which determined that users are looking for development of value-added research information and for a wider variety of mechanisms through which to be informed; and (2) the Taylor review, which proposed two key measures--implementation of a research utilization strategy and adoption of a system of research references. Section 4, "Better Dissemination and Utilization of VET Research," describes these measures: publish and distribute more research; develop new research information products; go digital; get the message out face-to-face; make VOCED a world-class VET research database; and promote greater public awareness of VET issues. Section 5 offers conclusions. The document contains 18 references and lists of research projects commencing in 1989-99, 1999-2000, and 1997/1998. (YLB)

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NCVER

MEASURES TO INCREASE THE IMPACT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING RESEARCH

Chris Robinson

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Chris Robinson

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Preface

The vocational education and training (VET) research effort in Australia has increased enormously in the 1990s, especially within the past five years.

A recent review of national VET research arrangements concluded that while recent progress has been very substantial, there is still a 'lack of connection between researchers and policy-makers' and a 'need for more analysis of VET databases and more quantitative and evaluation studies' (Taylor 1999).

In this paper the issue of how we might improve the impact of vocational education and training research and evaluation work in Australia is examined. The key lies in better linkages between the end-users of research and the research community itself, together with a deliberate strategy to improve both the awareness and use of research results in the vocational education and training sector.

This paper is based on the opening address, 'Making it count: Increasing the impact of VET research', presented to the 8th Annual VET Research Conference. The conference was sponsored by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and the Southern Queensland Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE). The conference was held at the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE, Toowoomba, Queensland, 7–8 July 1999.

Chris Robinson
National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd

1 Introduction

Vocational education and training (VET) is changing rapidly in Australia. Statistics from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) show that the number of people undertaking a publicly funded VET program in Australia broke the 1.5 million barrier for the first time during 1998 to reach a record level of 1.535 million people. This is a very substantial 60 per cent increase over the 950 000 or so people undertaking a VET program in Australia a decade ago.

Similarly, the numbers of apprentices and trainees in contracts of training in Australia have grown from just over 160 000 a decade ago to over 206 000 by the end of 1998.

The provision of training funded by employers is also extensive in Australia with an estimated $4.7 billion being spent by employers in 1996. This exceeds VET spending by governments. Over 60 per cent of businesses and public sector organisations provide some kind of structured or unstructured training over the course of a year in Australia.

These statistics are impressive, yet we know surprisingly little about whether our total training effort is adequate to meet our economic and social requirements, or whether we are doing enough in the right areas.

This is why our national research effort in VET is so important. It is only through a substantial and relevant research and evaluation effort that we can hope to make significant and systematic improvements to the national VET system.

The progress that has been made in increasing the national VET research effort in Australia is examined in this paper, together with mechanisms that have been, or are being, developed to increase the knowledge about and use of VET research results.

2 Increasing the national VET research effort

The need to increase the amount of VET research and to improve the linkages between VET research and policy-making has been recognised for some time in Australia. For instance, Hall (1993), Ramsey (1993), Butterworth (1994) and Wiltshire (1994) highlighted the then paucity of VET research in Australia, particularly in relation to its links with VET policy development.

The definitive piece of work at that time was the *No small change* report by McDonald et al. (1993), which proposed a national research and development strategy for VET in Australia. Subsequently, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) established the ANTA Research Advisory Council (ANTARAC) in 1994 to supplement the VET research then being done, mostly by NCVER. At that time some other research centres, mainly based in universities, began to get involved in VET research and some new VET research centres were established. This included centres funded directly by ANTA.

Arrangements for the management of VET research in Australia were rationalised by bringing together NCVER and some of the ANTA national VET research efforts under the one umbrella in late 1996. National VET research arrangements have since been oversighted by the National Research and Evaluation Committee (NREC). NREC is a sub-committee of the NCVER Board and is chaired by the chair of NCVER. The exception to these arrangements are the research centres which are funded directly by ANTA.

A national VET research and evaluation strategy—*The national research and evaluation strategy for vocational education and training in Australia: 1997–2000*—was developed in the first half of 1997 and released in July 1997 (NCVER 1997).

2.1 The development of the national research and evaluation strategy for VET

The national research and evaluation strategy for vocational education and training in Australia for 1997–2000 is described fully in NCVER (1997). Its main features are also described in Robinson (1997).

The strategy was based on:

- extensive consultations with stakeholders in the VET sector about their priorities and needs from research and evaluation
- the results of some 11 stocktakes or reviews of existing VET research literature to identify areas where gaps in the Australian VET research effort existed. These stocktakes are listed in appendix C, and have since been published as a consolidated volume (Robinson & Thomson 1998a)

Briefly, the national VET research and evaluation strategy involves:

- a series of contracted and commissioned original research and evaluation projects undertaken by the Australian VET research community
- a program of original VET research and evaluation projects undertaken by NCVER

- a series of stocktake studies reviewing the findings of the body of relevant research on different issues of particular interest to VET stakeholders, culminating in an NCVER *Review of Research* publication
- a set of quality assurance processes aimed at preparing high quality research briefs, improving project design, and reviewing, refereeing and editing projects to ensure high quality research output
- some contingency capacity to respond to issues raised by ministers and other key stakeholders as ones of high priority for immediate investigation

The research program carried out under the national VET research and evaluation strategy is oriented towards research and evaluation in six key priority areas identified in the national research strategy, namely:

- economic and social implications of VET
- employment and workforce
- pathways from school to work
- outcomes of the VET sector
- the quality of provision of VET
- future issues affecting the VET sector

The national VET research strategy is also oriented towards work arising from the priorities in Australia's national VET strategy *A bridge to the future* (ANTA 1998). These priorities are:

- equipping Australians for the world of work
- enhancing mobility in the labour market
- achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training
- increasing investment in training
- maximising the value of public vocational education and training

Provision is also made in the research program for 'open-ended' proposals to be brought forward by VET researchers for funding.

The other key feature of the national VET research and evaluation strategy is that it has been deliberately directed to meet the needs of VET stakeholders such as policy-makers and advisors, VET providers, industry, students, as well as the research community itself.

2.2 Progress to date

Progress in the first year under the national VET research and evaluation strategy was extensively documented by Robinson and Guthrie (1998). They reported some 60 projects were commenced in the first year, including:

- 11 stocktakes of research (mentioned in the previous section)
- 13 projects undertaken by NCVER in 1997–98
- 36 other projects commenced in the first year of the strategy (Robinson & Guthrie 1998, p.20)

Further projects under the strategy are outlined in the appendices of this report, including:

- 14 projects being done by NCVER that commenced in 1998–99 (appendix A)
- a further 10 NCVER projects being commenced in 1999–2000 (appendix B)
- some 23 other projects that commenced in 1998 (appendix C)

A new round of research projects to be funded under the strategy is currently being mounted, with projects to commence in the third and fourth quarters of 1999. The research priorities for this round encompass the following.

- Category 1: *Key research priorities for 1999*
  Projects in this category are directed at the following key research priorities:
  - training/learning culture
  - Australia's apprenticeship and traineeship system
  - participation and entitlement
  - outcomes in vocational education and training
  - best-practice case studies to assist registered training organisations in the implementation of training packages
  - the frontline management initiative
- Category 2: *Open category*
  This category allows for projects that are original and forward looking and which build on the body of research that has been undertaken within vocational education and training.
- Category 3: *Consolidation projects*
  Projects in this category bring together all the research done to date in the form of reviews of research on the following topics:
  - demand issues in VET
  - literacy and numeracy in VET
  - work placements in VET
  - on-line delivery of education and training
  - international comparisons of VET systems

Finally, NCVER has recently re-examined its core research activity in order to ensure its in-house research program better complements the other elements in the national VET research effort. The outcome of this process has been to develop a more focussed in-house research program that features:

- more research based on longitudinal studies
- work on the delivery of VET
- a specialisation in the analysis of industry training issues
- the development of a more focussed program of work in lifelong learning issues and what it means for VET
- more research work based on new analyses of the national VET statistical collections
- some more attention being given to relevant international issues

3 The effectiveness of the national VET research and evaluation effort

3.1 Recent studies

The evidence presented in the previous section demonstrates that the concerns from the early 1990s of an insufficient quantum of VET research have largely been overcome. The developments in VET research over the 1990s, particularly in the late 1990s, suggests that the overall quantity of VET research in Australia is now in a much better state.

For instance, the consolidated volume of reviews of VET research and evaluation referred to earlier (Robinson & Thomson 1998a) covers over 700 papers and reports, mainly in Australian VET research studies since 1990. This includes reprints of the 11 stocktakes of research that were undertaken as part of the national VET research and evaluation strategy (which are also listed in appendix C).

However, as Robinson and Thomson (1998b) argued, the issues now really relate to the quality and relevance of VET research, and to the need to transform Australia's VET sector from an environment that is frequently a 'research-free decision-making zone' to one where a high quality, rigorous and vibrant research culture exists.

Whatever the recent developments in the research side of the equation in Australian VET, the same cannot be said about the generation and use of evaluation work in VET in Australia. McDonald and Hayton (1997), in examining the VET evaluation effort in Australia, showed that evaluation has so far been little used in Australia for the improvement of VET. Moreover, they found comparatively low amounts of evaluation work being undertaken, with relatively few studies being published.

The question of the effectiveness of VET research and evaluation was the central question examined in a recent major study by Selby Smith et al. (1998) on *The impact of research on VET decision-making*. They found that VET research has had a more significant impact on decision-making than people have at first thought.

Selby Smith et al. (1998, p.21) found that:

> *The research enterprise is accumulative. Much research does not stand on its own as a piece of work, but adds to that which existed before. This accumulated body of knowledge contributes in decision-making to the creation of a climate of opinion and the development of a set of ideas, so that at any given time certain ideas, approaches or ways of thinking are in 'good currency', while others are not or are no longer.*

This study showed that research has played a critical role in VET decision-making. However, research does not operate in some kind of linear one-to-one way that people seem to expect, where one piece of research directly leads to a policy change or a new policy. Of course, there are some exceptions to this. Rather, the study shows that research is a cumulative endeavor that tends to feed into the 'conventional wisdom' about issues. It is through this process that research and evaluation results have had their effect.

3.2 The Figgis review

With these developments in mind, NREC and NCVER commissioned a project on how to promote better dissemination and more effective use of VET research by all of those involved in VET decision-making.

The review—*'Marketing vocational education and training research'* (Figgis 1998)—made two key conclusions. These were to:

- alert people to the fact that there is a research story
- tell the research story properly

With respect to alerting people to the fact that there is a research story, the Figgis review identified nine measures to promote the 'research story'. These were to:

- ensure that written research material goes directly to end-users through targeting it at individuals and end-user organisations
- develop 'research networks' to make better use of existing VET networks to get the research message out
- make use of discussion groups with VET institutes/authorities to promote interest in research information, with an emphasis on 'sharing' information rather than 'telling' people about research
- utilise the industry and VET newsletters that exist to get the research message out to a wider audience
- make more effective use of the web with the provision of timely and accurate research information to a wide domestic and international audience
- use email to notify users personally and directly that new material is available or that the web-site has new information on it
- re-think the use of conferences as a tool for research dissemination, with a shift to shorter, more focussed, more lively events that are both interesting and do not take people away from their worksites for long periods of time
- make greater use of the mainstream media (such as the *Australian Higher Education Supplement* and the *Campus Review*) to get VET research stories to their audiences
- use telephone contact with clients to provide a professional and friendly help-line service

In terms of telling the research story properly, Figgis identified demand by users for a number of different kinds of 'research product'. This includes:

- the traditional research project
- short summary versions that are quickly and widely available
- 'interpreted versions' that provide analytical interpretation of what research results mean in terms of their applications
- development of more 'customised' versions of research information that focus on different issues for different groups of users

Two key points come out of the Figgis review. First, users are looking for the development of 'value-added' research information material that informs them about what the body of research says about contemporary issues. They are not just the traditional research papers and reports. Second, users are looking to be informed through a wider variety of mechanisms, particularly through electronic information channels and the media etc.

3.3 The Taylor review

Rae Taylor was commissioned by ANTA to carry out a review in early 1999 of ANTA's national VET research arrangements. The review was asked to examine the effectiveness of key research centres funded directly by ANTA and the Research and Evaluation National Project. The latter is managed by NCVER under the direction of NREC and is the funding source for the majority of grants for VET research and evaluation projects in Australia. My focus here is on the Research and Evaluation National Project element of the review.

The review was asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the Research and Evaluation National Project and make recommendations on the management and funding of research in order to maximise the:

- relevance and timeliness of research outcomes to policy development in the VET sector
- timeliness and appropriateness of research and dissemination processes in relation to VET policy development processes
- originality of research contribution and the consequent increase in the pool of knowledge available to the VET sector
- quality in research methodology and outcomes
- value for money of research outcomes

The review was asked to consult widely with stakeholders in the VET sector, particularly the end-users of research.

The overall findings of the review were that:

- current arrangements involving NREC/NCVER were a significant improvement on previous arrangements for commissioning and managing VET research
- the content of the national research effort has improved, with greater efforts being made to consult on priorities and be aware of user needs
- NCVER's role in compiling national VET statistics, and in interpreting them, was an important part of the foundation of an improved research effort
- research dissemination processes were much improved, especially with the achievement of the *Research at a glance…* series (Taylor 1999, pp.2–3).

Taylor (1999, p.3), went on to say:

> *Whilst acknowledging that progress had been made stakeholders still emphasised the lack of connection between researchers and policy-makers, the need for more analysis of the VET databases and more quantitative and evaluation studies. Whilst praising the efforts on research dissemination, they were looking for more to be done. In short, they saw progress, but still a significant gap.*

The review concluded that management arrangements put into place for the National Research and Evaluation Project were adequate and had met necessary requirements. However, two key measures were proposed by the review specifically to improve the links between researchers and policy-makers.

These two measures are outlined below.

- The first is the implementation of a *research utilisation strategy* put forward by NCVER to build on current activities and to ensure that a better targetted approach is in place to bridge the gap between research output and the various stakeholders. The objective is the much more effective use of research results. It does not simply rely on disseminating research results, but encompasses a more pro-active 'brokerage' role involving interpretation of research results so that potential users can see what is in it for them.
- The second is the adoption of a system of *research references* being given by a minister or ministers (or the Ministerial Council) or the ANTA chief executive officers' group (i.e.

heads of national and State/Territory VET authorities). This approach would entail a particular issue or question being referred to a body for investigation and report (Taylor 1999, pp.3–4).

The approach being developed to promote dissemination and effective use of research is examined in the next section of this paper.

The research references proposal is a very significant one, whose adoption is essential if we are truly to develop research information that is driven by the *policy development cycle*, rather than by the *research production cycle*, as is the case at present.

4 Better dissemination and utilisation of VET research

The theme emerging from the discussion in the previous section of this paper is the need to make sure that the body of research work that is building up in Australia is actually used more in VET decision-making processes. Better decisions will be made if the results of rigorous and systematic analysis and research are incorporated into decision-making processes. This theme was outlined in Robinson (1999), in relation to policy, but it applied equally to other decision-making processes in VET. These include planning decisions by VET providers and the choice made by employers and students about the value of VET and what training to support/undertake.

Consequently, a number of different measures have been identified to improve the dissemination and utilisation of VET research and evaluation work. These measures build upon issues raised in Guthrie (1998) and Robinson and Guthrie (1998). These measures will also apply to the dissemination and utilisation of VET statistics. They are described below.

4.1 Publishing and distributing more research

A primary strategy in the wider dissemination of VET research and statistics is to publish and distribute a greater number of high quality VET research and statistical reports. This includes publishing more books, research reports, research papers, statistical publications and reviews of research in the *Review of Research* series. Thus, NCVER will extend its publishing policy to cover research other than that directly funded under the national strategy to any research reports submitted to NCVER that are judged to be of high quality and of critical interest to the VET sector.

4.2 The development of new research information products

4.2.1 Preparation of 'research flyers' for every completed project

A brief 'plain English' flyer will be prepared for each completed research and evaluation project that is:

- undertaken by NCVER
- funded by NCVER
- published by NCVER

This will set out the main issues investigated in the research and the main findings of the work. The latter will include particular emphasis on any findings that have implications for changes in the VET policies and practices.

Preparation of a draft flyer will be the responsibility of research authors, but some resources will be devoted to consistent presentation of the research 'story' and key findings.

4.2.2 Extending the *'Research at a glance . . .'* series

In terms of brokering the results of research to enable more effective use of research, end-users have continually expressed the need to know the answer to questions such as 'what are the main findings of a body of research work on a particular issue?' or 'what implications do research findings about different VET issues have for developing new policies or making improvements for the future?'

The emphasis is on the implications of the results of a body of research work on various VET issues, rather than just knowing the findings of a particular research project. In response, NCVER developed a new product during 1998 called *Research at a glance ...* to inform people about results of a wide range of research on a particular issue and to explore policy implications and options for improvements.

The first issue was *Research at a glance: Small business and vocational education and training* released in the latter part of 1998 (NCVER 1998), which has been very well received by VET stakeholders. A number of issues of *Research at a glance ...* are planned to cover a variety of VET themes including lifelong learning, industry training, the changing nature of work and VET and changing modes of VET delivery. As well as these major themes, it is planned that *Research at a glance ...* will also include shorter publications on a range of minor themes. *Research at a glance ...* will appear five to six times per year and will be an integral component of the research utilisation strategy.

4.2.3 Establishing the *'Research says'* series

This quarterly publication, in hard copy and on the web, takes the form of a research newsletter highlighting the latest VET research from within Australia and around the world. The results of new research are summarised and full details given of publications and authors so that interested parties can contact researchers directly. *Research says* also gives details of the latest research publications from NCVER.

The format for *Research says* is:

- very succinct and brief
- based on the latest research
- not glossy and in plain English

The *Research says* first issue has been released and subsequent issues covering research released in each quarter will appear in April, July, October and December of each year. The *Research says* series will be available on the web or in a 'non-glossy' printed form and distributed to a wide range of VET stakeholders.

4.2.4 Revitalising the *'Getting to grips with . . .'* series

Conventional research and statistical output do not necessarily draw out the practical implications for users such as trainers and teachers or people also responsible for the planning and design of training programs.

NCVER has developed a highly successful *Getting to grips with ...* series of good practice guides for VET practitioners.

This series will be revitalised and expanded under the research utilisation strategy to develop a *Getting to grips with ...* product from any research project undertaken or funded by NCVER (including any VET statistical material). All NCVER projects will be examined for their potential for the development of *Getting to grips with ...* products. The results of other national (and international) research will also be examined for their potential to develop new *Getting to grips with ...* products.

NCVER is establishing a specialist capacity to develop these critically important products.

4.3 Going digital

Increasingly, the world wide web is becoming the major source for research-based information. NCVER is conscious that its website will become the face that it presents to the world in the future. NCVER is currently undertaking a major overhaul of its website to enable faster and easier access to the results of both Australian and international VET research. A critical element of the new website will be the enhanced Vocational Education and Training Research Database (VOCED) (see below). Details of all VET 'research in progress' projects being undertaken or funded by NCVER will automatically be included on the website in an electronic *new research digest*.

NCVER will also provide a platform here for other Australian researchers/institutes directly to enter details of their VET research in progress onto the NCVER website. Information about NCVER's VET statistics on the web will continue to be expanded.

4.4 Getting the message out face to face

A key finding about research and statistical utilisation is that major stakeholders have little or no time to digest lengthy and complex material. However, retention of key findings can be enhanced through oral presentation and interactive discussion about the key issues raised.

Hence, an important part of the utilisation strategy is to run a series of *research policy roadshows* to highlight and discuss the key findings of VET research work and statistical analyses.

Late in 1998, the first in this new series of policy briefing workshops was commenced. The workshops provided briefings on:

- NCVER's research program and the strategy for disseminating research findings
- some key research results of significance to policy-makers in areas such as
  - VET and small business
  - industry training research and the outlook for training in Australia's industries
  - evaluating the impact of competency-based training (CBT)
  - returns on investment in training
  - access and equity issues in VET
  - career choices by learners, including how they choose and use VET programs and providers
- how research has impacted on VET decision-making based on the findings of the major recently completed research project on this topic by Selby Smith et al. (1998)

These briefings were aimed at policy advisors in national, State and Territory VET government departments and authorities.

Another policy briefing series has recently commenced. This series—'Australian apprentice and trainee recent trends briefings'—is aimed at national employer and union organisations, State training boards and national, State and Territory government departments and training authorities.

An important development of the policy roadshows will be to mount an extensive program of *provider research roadshows* aimed at VET providers. Taking place over a two-year period and based on Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, the *provider roadshows* aim to reach teachers/trainers in both the public and private sectors. The roadshows will focus on issues of direct relevance to teachers/trainers such as the marketing of VET in the local community and the use of new forms of delivery. The *provider roadshows* will use the results of recent research on teaching and learning to improve practice at the individual level.

The strategic use of VET conferences and workshops to get key messages out about what the results of research and statistical analyses are saying about VET will be further utilised as part of this strategy.

NCVER will make increasing use of shorter and more highly focussed workshops aimed at bringing together both users and producers of research to ensure the better take-up of research results and the better design of research in the first place. A program of focussed workshops will be developed.

4.5 Making VOCED a world-class VET research database

The VOCED research database provides abstracts and author, title and publication details about VET research reports, published papers, journal articles, conference papers, policy papers and VET statistical material. There are now over 10 000 entries giving comprehensive coverage of Australian and New Zealand work and increasing coverage of international material, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

In the past couple of years VOCED has been greatly improved through going on-line on the web in 1997, now enabling:

- world-wide access to the latest research information and instant access to author, title and keyword searches of information on VOCED
- direct submission of material from Australia's 20-plus VET research centres as part of the establishment of memoranda of understanding between NCVER and all other Australian VET research centres to share VET research
- much more direct coverage of VET and educational journals to ensure comprehensive coverage of published domestic and international VET research on VOCED

The VOCED research database is being transformed into a powerful VET research tool by capturing and indexing all specialist VET journals and other relevant education and training journals that are published in English. VOCED will become the leading international database of VET research and will allow Australians involved in VET access to the latest research results from Australia and overseas. Other international VET research databases will be added to the database. This database will capture all major published VET research, policy and statistical information that is published in English.

The process of transforming VOCED into a world-class international VET research database will involve the indexing and abstracting of both national and international material. This will comprise all Australian VET-related journal articles, key international VET-related journal articles and all major research publications from international VET agencies. These agencies include the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). In addition, publications of key Australian and international VET or VET-related research centres such as the United States National Center for Research into Vocational Education (NCRVE) will also be indexed and abstracted for the VOCED database.

The transformation of VOCED will proceed in two phases.

- The first will be an initial 'catch-up' phase, during which the backlog of articles, monographs and other publications from 1995 will be entered onto the database. Abstracts and other information about relevant articles from some 80 international and Australian VET/TVET (technical and vocational education and training) related journals will be included on the VOCED database, together with the major information about the published outputs of the key international VET agencies that have been identified.
- The second will be an ongoing 'maintenance phase', to ensure that all material coming out from now on is incorporated onto VOCED.

4.6 Promoting greater public awareness of VET issues

NCVER recently adopted a policy of examining each and every piece of completed research it undertakes and/or publishes to:

- determine whether or not there is a message suitable for placement in the mainstream or specialist VET/education/industry media
- prepare articles (and briefings where appropriate) in such cases
- in some cases involve ministers in the launch of such materials to get wider publicity

NCVER will establish a capacity for article preparation and placement across relevant Australian specialist and mainstream print media. This will involve a pro-active approach to key media editors and writers.

A more pro-active approach to the radio (and, very occasionally, TV) media will also be explored for some key areas.

A much wider public awareness of VET issues and the benefits of VET is necessary. It is interesting to note that ANTA has embarked on a major market research/marketing program this year in an attempt to raise the public profile of VET in Australia.

5 Conclusions

The key conclusion we need to draw out about the effectiveness of VET research is that no matter how good each research project is in terms of quality and relevance, doing research itself is only half the job.

From a key recent study, *The impact of research on VET decision-making* (Selby Smith et al. 1998), we can conclude that research does have a critical role to play in VET decision-making, although its role is usually indirect. Research was found to have a cumulative effect on 'conventional wisdom' which, in turn, was found to underpin new developments in VET. There is not usually a one-to-one linear relationship between a particular piece of research and a new policy or program. This study shows that a high quality and well-disseminated research program is a critical foundation of any measures to improve VET decision-making.

The other conclusion we need to draw, which is enforced by the findings of Figgis (1998) and Taylor (1999), is that most effective use of research will not just happen through some kind of 'mysterious osmosis'.

Like good research, effective utilisation needs to be part of a deliberate strategy that is well planned and draws upon work of the highest quality and relevance. Moreover, effective utilisation of research will only occur if use is made of different approaches geared to meeting end-user requirements.

In response, NCVER has developed a research utilisation strategy as part of the further development of the national VET research and evaluation strategy.

A key role for NCVER is to promote the wide dissemination of research results and to broker those results, as appropriate, to the different VET stakeholders (such as policy-makers, VET providers, trainers and teachers, employers, students and the community in general) so that all those involved in VET can make more informed decisions. The research utilisation strategy is designed to ensure much more effective use of research results.

This brokerage role is a core and critical priority for NCVER.

The research utilisation strategy is designed to promote the effective use of all relevant VET research results, irrespective of whether that research was funded under the national research strategy or not, and irrespective of whether the research was done in Australia or overseas. The strategy encompasses the dissemination, brokerage and utilisation of published VET statistics and NCVER reports that analyse these statistics.

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Appendix A

NCVER research projects commencing in 1998–99

Survey of assessment methods currently being used in the VET sector

Destination survey of students who participated in school–industry programs

Outcomes achieved by VET graduates

An investigation of how to apply the philosophy of quality management to the process of learning, and identify the implications this has for lifelong education

An evaluation of how current approaches to delivery of VET meet the needs of a VET system that is committed to making lifelong learning a reality

Developing strategies to deal with CBT problems in Australia

Demand and supply of skills in Australia

International comparisons and VET

Outcomes from VET in schools

Occupational shifts and new apprenticeship training

The VET experience of different groups of Australians

Development of VET in Australia

Industry training outlook studies

Participation in the outcomes from VET by young adults aged 20–24 years

Appendix B

NCVER research projects commenced in 1999–2000

The effectiveness of new technology in vocational education

Stocktake on industry training

The role of the Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioner

Training indicators

Module-only enrolments and lifelong learning

Outcomes from enabling courses

Role of private providers in skill development

Outcomes for new apprentices in small/medium enterprises

Comparisons of the Australian training system with the Korean training system

International comparisons of training frameworks

Appendix C

Other projects funded under the national strategy that commenced in 1997 and 1998

1997 PROJECTS

Review of Research

Competition and market reform in the Australian VET sector	D Anderson
Public and private training provision	K Barnett
Returns to enterprises from investment in VET	S Billett & M Cooper
Assessor training programs	R Docking
VET and small business	J Gibb
Learning in the workplace	P Hager
Quality assurance in VET	P Hager
Flexible delivery of training	P Kearns
Entry-level training	D Lundberg
A brief history of the evaluation of VET in Australia	R McDonald & G Hayton
Vocational education in schools	R Ryan

Other research projects

VET for indigenous peoples	FIAEP, B Boughton
VET for people from rural/non-metropolitan areas	Uni Tas Consulting, S Kilpatrick
Impediments to the employment of young people	NILS, M Wooden
Research at a glance—VET and small business	Kim Bannikoff & Assoc., K Bannikoff
VET for people from non-English-speaking backgrounds	RMIT, V Volkoff
Jobs change in Australia 1987–1996 Product: Data for the Industry Training Outlook Conference & publication	John Ray & Associates

Motivations and experiences of students moving between TAFE and university sectors Product: Article in *Training Agenda* and report in VOCED database	Canberra Institute of Technology, M Kinsman
VET for early school leavers	The Learning Enterprise, M Willis
VET for indigenous peoples	ATSICC, S Howard
Trends in employment by occupation by industry from 1987–96 Product: Data for the Industry Training Outlook Conference & publication	John Ray & Associates, J Ray
Marketing VET research Product: Report printed for distribution internally	AAAJ Consulting, J Figgis
Changing relationships among industry, enterprises, regions/ communities and individuals and their influence on policy and practice in VET	Griffith University, S Billett
Student mentoring—a model for high achievement and low attrition in VET programs	WA Academy of Performing Arts, A Bond
Access to post-secondary school education and training	Griffith University, E Kendall
The changing nature of work and its implications for training arrangements and processes	Workplace Learning Initiatives, R Sefton
Impact of generic competencies on workplace performance	RCVET UTS, D Mazzina
Combined study and work pathways in VET: Policy implications and analysis	UMTC, P Dwyer
Women & VET	University of Adelaide, E Butler
Evaluation of the effects that CBT and assessment has made to VET in Australia	Griffith University, S Billett
Evaluation of the contribution of CBT	University of Melbourne, D Mulcahy
The relationship between training and small business	Uni Tas Consulting, S Kilpatrick
The outcomes of entry-level VET training programs delivered to young people	ACER and Centre for Economics of Education and Training, J Malley
Evaluation of the effects that competency-based approaches have had on the role of instructors	Charles Sturt University, T Lowrie
Delivery of VET programs by adult community education providers	RMIT, V Volkoff
New management practices and enterprise training	Charles Sturt University, A Smith

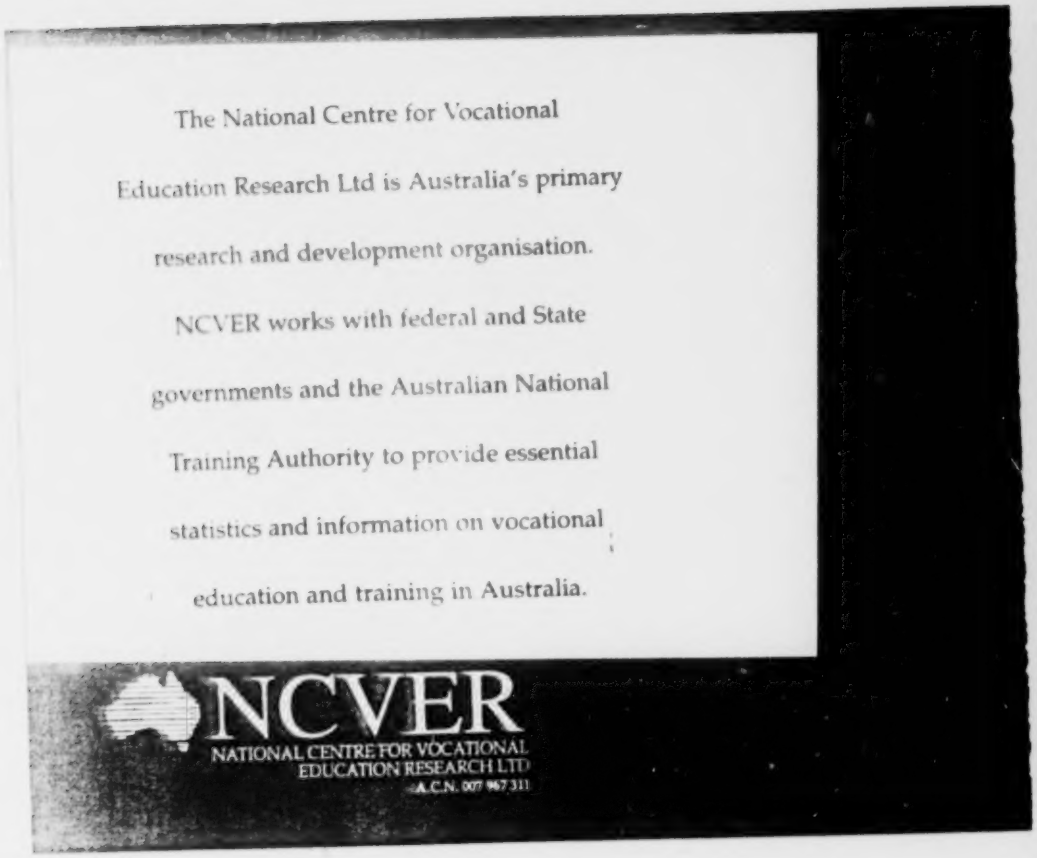
VET in small rural school communities	Country Education Project and Youth Research Centre, M Chiswell
VET for indigenous peoples (with particular regard to Aboriginal community-controlled organisations)	FIAEP, D Durnan
Building workplace pedagogies: the role and function of the workplace trainer in the small business environment	CREEW, University of South Australia
How the emerging national training market is being affected by the forces of globalisation and current VET institutional arrangements	ACIRRT, J Buchanan
Evaluation of the contribution competency-based assessment has made to VET in Australia	CVAR, J Lagunzad
Removing the blinders: Views of Australian VET from beyond its own borders	RCVET UTS, D Mazzina
Small enterprise workplace learning: Links to school vocational education	Enterprise Partnerships, F Wyatt
Impact and consequences of market reforms in VET	CEET, D Anderson
Analysis of the implementation of VET in Australian school systems	ACER, J Malley
Models of labour market supply and demand and their use in projecting VET requirements	CDR Consulting, M Burns
Quality VET provision through appropriate course structures for emerging patterns of employment/unemployment	NSW Department of Education & Training, P Grant
An outcome study of entry-level VET on young people with disabilities	PEP Employment Services (Inc.)
Visioning VET—an exploration of potential future policies	NSW Department of Education & Training, Dr T Anderson

1998 PROJECTS

Lifelong learning and VET	Global Learning Services Pty Ltd, P Kearns
Internationalisation of VET	RIPVET, Gordon Institute of TAFE, P Smith
VET for those in correctional institutions	UMTC, M Harford
Implications of outsourcing and the casualisation of the workforce for VET	NILS, M Wooden
Internationalisation of VET	Barry Hobart & Associates
Assessing in VET	University of Ballarat, A Bateman

Economic model for Industry Training Outlook Conference	Econtech, C Murphy
Income differences between male and female TAFE graduates	T Dumbrell
New and emerging technologies and their application in the VET sector for deaf and hard-of-hearing students	Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, L Lawford
How best should students receive support to assist them enter and successfully complete VET?	VEAC, J Lagunzad
Evaluation of web-based flexible learning	Griffith University, C McKavanagh
The implications of outsourcing and the casualisation of the workforce for VET	ACIRRT, R Callus
Enterprise return on a training investment	Austral Asia Economics, R Blandy
Enterprise return on a training investment in the Australian context	University of Melbourne, L Maglen
Enterprise return on a training investment	RCVET, UTS, M Egg
How individuals choose VET programs	University of Queensland, G Maxwell
Outcomes of VET	Tom Dumbrell & Associates, T Dumbrell
Improving the quality of VET provision: The role of staff development	University of South Australia, R Harris
Enterprise return on a training investment	Employment & Training Group, P Sgro
Four projects on cross-sectional education and training issues: ❖ outputs and outcomes from different education and training sectors ❖ access and equity in post-compulsory education and training ❖ an analysis of cross-sectoral student pathways ❖ effective institutional structures for delivering cross-sectoral education and training	University of Canberra, Network for Lifelong Learning, L Watson

Notes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